

**PREPARED REMARKS FOR FRANKLIN SANDS  
FLORIDA HOUSE DEMOCRATIC LEADER  
Associated Press Editors Conference  
Tallahassee, Florida  
State Capitol, 22<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
January 22, 2009**

**Good morning, and thank you for allowing me the opportunity to meet with you.**

**I am Franklin Sands. I represent House District 98 in Broward County, and I am the leader of the state House Democratic Caucus.**

**As most of you probably know, our caucus today is 44 members strong. And we are, of course, in the minority in the 120-member House of Representatives.**

**On the Fourth Floor, we are forced to the back rows of the House chamber. We don't have the plushiest offices in the Capitol. And we don't have all the perks of leadership.**

**But we are eager to serve and fight for the people who trusted us with their votes and sent us to Tallahassee.**

**So, I urge you to pay some attention to our team during the upcoming legislative session. We might surprise you. We will show you --- and your readers, viewers and listeners --- that we deserve to be in the front rows.**

**While I cannot make you any promises about what we'll be allowed to achieve under the damper of Republican leadership, I can assure you that we will present alternative solutions.**

**For sure, you will see that we represent the diversity of Florida and of our party from Key West to Jacksonville and Pensacola, and all the counties and communities in between.**

**Mostly, though, you will see that we are a hopeful caucus...Hopeful that our solutions will be heard above the political din.**

**In working with our colleagues in the Senate, we will strive to bring to Tallahassee the kind of change that America is already witnessing in Washington under our new president, Barack Obama.**

**I want to share a few of our Caucus' goals and concerns with you. But, first, let me tell you how much I appreciate the work that YOU do.**

**I know that Florida's news organizations, like Florida's businesses and families, are facing challenging times. As managers, editors, writers, reporters and publishers, you are making tough decisions everyday about what to cover and how to serve your audience. Your task doesn't get any easier with fewer resources and new forms of competition.**

**Here, in the State Capitol, we've seen the changes and reductions in media coverage. There are fewer reporters observing and commenting on the public's business than there were only a few years ago.**

**And that is a very scary thing to the democratic process of open government.**

**But your commitment to being here today---and your ongoing interest in the Legislature and state government---is stellar. The work of the Press Corps is vital, and I want you to know that it is respected.**

**The quality of journalism produced in Florida, and in this building, is among the finest in America. You can be proud of being part of that service, and for carrying on a great tradition that is essential if we are to continue as a democracy that promotes open government for the people.**

**I am grateful that Florida's Sunshine Laws remain among the strongest in the nation.**

**I want you to know that even though there has been a very large cloud over Tallahassee that has blocked the sunshine during budget negotiations, I intend to be a guardian of those sunshine laws and a promoter of the public's right to know when it concerns their government, their taxes, and the services people rely on.**

**Only with open access can people have the tools they need to hold government—and its leaders---accountable. I recognize that it's imperative that we all strive to create a culture that fosters public trust and confidence.**

**It is imperative that we have a government that truly operates in the sunshine. In press interviews of my colleagues across the aisle, I was promised "a seat at the table." But at no time in the special session was I consulted about a major budget related decision.**

**In just my first few months of leadership of our caucus, I have been the subject of some inquiry from the press.**

**Some of the decisions I've made, and some developments in my personal life, have become a matter of interest. I have tried to maintain an open door with the media, and I have answered questions.**

**I have done so because I think it is of great importance for the people to be engaged and informed---especially through news organizations like yours---and for the accountability of elected leaders.**

**As you know, only days ago, we finished a special session to adjust the state budget because of a drastic deficit.**

**Well, I'm being polite. I say ADJUST, but I could just as easily say that we SLASHED public schools and voluntary prekindergarten funding.**

**And we DRAINED and we BORROWED from accounts, such as the Lawton Chiles Endowment that is meant for children's health care.**

**We have taken the TRUST out of the trust funds of our state.**

And just as baffling, we PUT AT RISK a proven program that brings in more money – yes, more money -- to the state, even during economic downturns like the current one. We tapped tourism promotion dollars under the Visit Florida program.

We cut a program that generates fifty-eight dollars for every dollar spent. The same goes for the one-hundred-ninety million dollars that we cut from the Sadowski program that would have produced thousands more affordable homes.

Now, again, I'm being polite. When I say WE, I mean the Legislature. But I KNOW THAT YOU KNOW that this lawmaker and the House Democratic Caucus didn't endorse all those decisions.

We didn't endorse these decisions because we are pretty sure of one economic certainty: That is, cutting state spending irresponsibly will definitely hurt the economy long term.

Let me say it again: Cutting state spending irresponsibly will definitely hurt Florida's economy long term.

The House Democratic Caucus advocates solutions that haven't had a fair hearing.

The people haven't had a fair hearing.

We know that from special session.

In the future, we should remember that it is unfair to ask people to testify within hours of a budget's first printing.

We should open the process for all stakeholders with a fair schedule for testimony, questions and answers, and debate.

When we return for regular session, we will be asked to balance the budget by potentially another Four Billion dollars. I can only hope that, this time, it won't be done in secret.

The Democratic caucus wants an open, honest discussion about what the state is spending.

Too often in the Legislature we mislead people. For instance, people have been misled about what the STATE is actually spending on public education. The truth is, for more than 10 years, the amount of money that STATE GOVERNMENT is spending on public education is shrinking. We're putting more burden on those who pay local property taxes and rents to fund public education.

I think a great deal of Governor Charlie Crist and his team. But I differ with him over something he was quoted as saying recently.

During the special session, I'm told that he pointed to the Capitol Plaza and noted that there were no protesters outside our doors.

If I understand right, I think he was suggesting that there are relatively few people upset about the budgetary decisions being made by the Republican leadership.

But I beg to differ. I think a lot of Floridians have simply given up on Tallahassee. I know this because I get the angry phone calls and emails.

I think people know that a protest with this Legislature doesn't always work to save our education system from painful cuts.

I think they feel helpless in their abilities to stop the Legislature from spending on prisons rather than on programs that keep people out of prisons.

I fear that they don't realize that we can do more to grow our economy and create new jobs.

I am worried that they don't know that it is possible, under strong leadership, to take back some of the onerous tax breaks for the wealthy that Jeb Bush so generously handed HIS supporters.

Now, I intend no disrespect to my Republican friends with my remarks here today. They are loyal public servants, and they are genuinely interested in doing the right thing. But I think that when it came time to fix this budget, they missed opportunities.

I hope that our governor can improve the Legislature's work with his veto pen.

In the weeks ahead, we need a more robust debate about the state's needs, its priorities, and the methods for paying for those things.

Let me read just a little paragraph:

*"Florida is a state with boundless economic potential, a state we can keep on the cutting edge. Florida is also a state with jammed highways, polluted natural resources, struggling schools, poorly paid teachers, teeming jails, neglected children, needy senior citizens, inadequate health care, a shortage of affordable housing, and a declining quality of life. Florida is on a collision course with painful realities that must be faced."*

Now, this is something that could have been written yesterday. It was written 20 years ago, back when Democrats were in charge, as part of the Zwick committee report.

So, the question being begged is this: What has happened?

I think very little. So, you see, this is a nonpartisan issue. It is simply a question of whether we, as elected officials, will have the political courage to deal, once and for all, with these problems that threaten the very fabric and sustainability of Florida.

So, I say again, it is time to revisit our tax structure.

**It is time to make it a fairer system so that the poor are less vulnerable, the middle class stops being squeezed, and the wealthy pay their fair share.**

**It's time to revisit our overburdened tax structure.**

**It's about fairness.**

**There are loopholes that no longer serve the purpose for which they were created.**

**We must protect our brick and mortar stores on Main Street.**

**Maybe this is the year we should demand some changes, some fairness, and show some political courage...and trust the people.**

**There are a lot of reasons for making these kinds of changes to our state's financial structure. I'd say that there are almost 18 million reasons to make these changes. A reason for each and every person who lives in this great state.**

**As Democrats, we've been falsely branded on issues of economic policy. Those who differ with our views continue to fall back on old metaphors and false labels.**

**We are NOT tax-and-spend liberals. But many of us have been guilty of having been too passive, or too silent, because it was easier to go-along, get along, or because of fear of political repercussions.**

**So, let me tell you what this House Democrat stands for.**

**I stand for the middle class.**

**I stand for the under-served in our society.**

**I stand for the senior citizens and veterans.**

**I stand for small businesses.**

**Actually, I stand for all businesses that are good corporate citizens.**

**I stand for children eager to learn.**

**Families in need of health care, good jobs, and a more certain future.**

**I stand for the single mom, working at a low-wage, full-time job and struggling to bring up her kids.**

**For too many years now, the promise of trickle-down economics of Jeb Bush and the Republican era hasn't paid off for the average citizen.**

**It's time that we concern ourselves more with the working people who need the friendly hand of state government and to protect them from the unfriendly, crushing boot of disproportionate and regressive taxes.**

**So while I have your attention, let me tell you more about one change that I want. It is a matter of personal interest to me.**

**It has to do with embryonic stem cell research, an area where other countries are taking the lead.**

**Do you know that the average job in the field of embryonic stem cell research pays seventy-two-thousand dollars a year?**

**In Florida, that's a high-paying job; and the kind that can kick start our economy.**

**More importantly, there are countless stories that exemplify the power and the promise of stem cells to treat and cure those who are suffering.**

**I am thinking now of a young boy, Adam Susser, who was able to go from being blind to being able to see through advances in stem cell research.**

**Although he is a Floridian, his family had to take him to Mexico to get treatment because that treatment was not available in the United States.**

**Each year, 100,000 Americans will develop Alzheimer's disease. Over 1 million adults will be diagnosed with diabetes this year. And there are many people with spinal cord injuries who are struggling for independence.**

**Barack Obama has shown a commitment to make changes in this regard. I can only hope that we, in Florida, will put necessary resources toward this task.**

**I want to see BOLD action in Florida.**

**We have restricted the scientific institutes, including ones in which we have already invested tax dollars like Torrey Pines, Scripps, Max Planck Society, from doing the research that they're best able to do.**

**I am confident that our new president will allow federal funding for stem cell research at the National Institute of Health.**

**Likewise, I hope that we can dedicate Florida's resources to these and other priorities to create a strong and sustainable economic development.**

**So, whether it's my hope for a new focus on embryonic stem cell research...or the House Democratic Caucus' goals, of economic reform for the poor, the middle class and small businesses...there is a need for the people to be engaged---AND THE PRESS TO BE INVOLVED.**

**In closing, let me share a thought that I know Governor Crist has mentioned on occasion.**

**He has noted the wisdom of President Lincoln and his advocacy for the PEOPLE's WILL as the guiding force in a true democracy.**

**I think we need dramatic change in this state to restore the people's confidence and to encourage their participation.**

**Open government, and the involvement of the people, guarantees that vision of Lincoln: a government of the people, by the people, and for the people.**

**So, again, thank you for allowing me to visit with you. And unless my speaking time has run out, I'll be happy to take a few questions.**

**###**